

To: Harris County Commissioners Court

Through: David Berry, Executive Director, Budget Management Department

Prepared By: Lucinda Silva, Director Agenda and Administration, Budget Management Department

Subject: Amended Travel and Business Meeting Policy due to COVID-19

Project ID (If applicable):

Purpose and Request:

Request by the Continuity of Government Task Force for approval to temporarily amend the Blanket Travel and Training Requests section of the Travel and Business Meeting Policy to not allow departments to submit "blanket" travel requests for overnight or out-of-state travel, due to the COVID-19 pandemic with the change lasting until a certain threat level is met.

Background and Discussion:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Continuity of Government Task Force is recommending that we amend the travel policy temporarily to not allow departments to submit "blanket" travel requests through Court. We recommend travel requests be specific. This temporary change should last until a certain threat level is met.

Fiscal Impact:

NA

Fiscal Summary			
Expenditures	FY 20-21	FY 21-22 Projected	Future Years Projected [3 additional years]
Service Impacted: <i>[Please provide service or division where expenditure will be used]*</i>			
Existing Budget			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
Existing Department Budget			
Please Identify Funding Source (General Fund, PIC, Special Revenue, Grant, Etc.)			
<i>[INSERT FUNDING SOURCE HERE]*</i>			
Total Sources			

Alternatives:

NA

Alignment with Strategic Objective:

NA

Attachments:

Previously approved August 1, 2017 - Travel and Business Meeting Policy



HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

BUDGET MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

Administration Building

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Houston, TX 77002

Office (713) 274-1100

July 25, 2017

To: County Judge Emmett and
Commissioners Ellis, Morman,
Radack, and Cagle

Fm: William J. Jackson

Re: **Travel and Business Meeting Policy**

Vote of the Court:

	Yes	No	Abstain
Judge Emmett	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Ellis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Morman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Radack	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Cagle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Request for approval of the attached revised travel and business meeting policy effective September 1, 2017.

Any previously approved travel requests, excluding blanket requests, shall be reviewed by the requesting Department Head to ensure compliance with the updated policy. The per diem rate applies to travel completed after August 31, 2017. Any previously approved travel requests will not require additional court approval for per diem adjustments.

If any issues or questions arise, please email the Budget Management Department at travelagenda@hctx.net.

Presented to Commissioners' Court

AUG 01 2017

APPROVE CLM

Recorded Vol. _____ Page _____

All JPIS - copy

DEM - copy

Dist Cts - copy

FC - copy

Co Cts - copy

Co Lib - copy

Treasurer - copy

AgriLife - copy

Travel and Business Meeting Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a uniform and consistent method for administering Harris County's Travel and Business Meeting Policy, and to ensure that county funds are spent in a manner that provides full accountability of resources. This policy provides for the reasonable needs of business travelers and establishes criteria for food and non-alcoholic beverages at county business meetings. This policy is effective September 1, 2017. Commissioners Court reserves the right to rescind and/or amend this policy at any time.

Scope

This policy applies to travel and county business meetings for Harris County elected officials, department heads, and employees. This policy is applicable to all funds accounted for by the County Auditor except for those discretionary funds within the exclusive control of an elected official. This policy indicates the basis under which county business travel will be authorized and establishes per diem rates for meals and incidentals. This policy also establishes criteria for the reimbursement of food and non-alcoholic beverages for county business meetings.

Court Approval

The following require court approval:

- All Out of Texas travel.
- All travel with overnight lodging.
- Training with expenses more than \$100, excluding mileage.
- Blanket travel and training requests.
- Business meetings not hosted by Harris County (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club meetings, etc.) with expenses more than \$100, excluding mileage.
- County business meetings with food and non-alcoholic beverages more than \$250 per event or \$15 per person (see page 4 for details).

Departments are encouraged to obtain court approval prior to travel and training events. If unable to obtain court approval prior to the event, Travel & Training Request forms may be submitted to court within 30 days of the event. Travel & Training Request forms not approved by court and not submitted within 30 days may result in non-reimbursement.

*Please note: If a travel request was previously approved in court and changes are made (i.e., number of employees, estimated expenses, funding source, event dates), the request requires additional court approval.

The following do not require court approval:

- Routine mileage reimbursement associated with normal job duties.
- Meal reimbursements up to \$25 per day with a receipt for travel outside of the county without an overnight stay.
- Training with expenses at or under \$100, excluding mileage.
- Business meetings not hosted by Harris County (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club meetings, etc.) with expenses at or under \$100, excluding mileage.
- County business meetings with food and non-alcoholic beverages at or under \$250 per event or \$15 per person (see page 4 for details).

Travel and Training Budgets

Each department shall allocate funds to their travel and training budget as deemed necessary. Departments are encouraged to use online training and video conferences to minimize travel expenses to ensure that each travel arrangement is the most cost-effective, considering all relevant factors.

Requests requiring court approval for travel and training expenses shall be submitted to Commissioners Court on an In Texas or Out of Texas Travel & Training Request form. Travel expense reimbursements shall be recorded on the appropriate County Auditor's form and submitted to the County Auditor within 60 days of the end of travel.

Refer to the County Auditor's *Travel Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures, T.1., and Mileage Reimbursement, I.1-2.*, for specific requirements and when Travel & Training Request forms shall be submitted for Commissioners Court approval.

In Texas Travel

Meals & Incidentals

A per diem rate of \$55 per day is established for meals and incidentals (tips/gratuities), which applies to both In Texas and Out of Texas travel with overnight lodging. The per diem replaces actual meal costs and receipts are not required. Per diems are allowed on dates of travel and dates with overnight lodging. Meal reimbursements are allowed up to \$25 per day with a receipt for travel outside of the county without an overnight stay.

Overnight Lodging

Overnight lodging expenses will be reimbursed based on actual charges; however, the cost shall be reasonable for the city. Overnight lodging expenses incurred the night before county business begins and the night after county business ends are reimbursable if the expenses are incurred to qualify for discount airfare or if travel to or from the office reasonably requires more than one day.

Transportation

County elected officials, department heads, or employees are entitled to be reimbursed for transportation charges incurred while conducting county business. It is the responsibility of the department head to ensure that the most cost effective method of transportation is utilized, considering all relevant factors. Requests to use a county vehicle with overnight lodging shall have Commissioners Court approval. If a county elected official, department head, or employee travels by personal car, the county has adopted a mileage reimbursement rate in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service standard mileage rate. Reimbursable mileage is calculated as the mileage from the employee's normal work location to destination or home to destination, whichever is less, utilizing www.mapquest.com.

Airline travel shall be planned in advance to ensure best rates are obtained, considering all relevant factors. Expenses associated with travel (i.e., parking, tolls, taxi, public transportation, rental cars, rental car insurance) are reimbursable with receipt. Refer to the County Auditor's *Travel Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures, T.1.*, for specific requirements.

Out of Texas Travel

Out of Texas travel expenses will not be paid from the general fund, unless otherwise reviewed by the County Budget Officer, and submitted to Commissioners Court for approval. All other rules are the same as In Texas travel.

International Travel

The Commissioners Court order of August 8, 2006 prohibiting county business travel outside of the United States shall remain in effect. No travel funds will be approved for travel outside of the United States, except in "extraordinary circumstances which involve county business". The extraordinary circumstances travel necessity requires prior approval from Commissioners Court, the County Budget Officer, and the department head.

Blanket Travel and Training Requests

The Commissioners Court policy adopted March 6, 2007 will remain in effect regarding travel and training expense requests which cover a fiscal year, a grant fiscal year, or a similar extended period for attendance at consistent and on-call meetings that are expected. In those cases, the department head shall submit an In Texas and/or Out of Texas Travel Request form with the number of employees and projected costs for the period. At the end of the fiscal year, a grant fiscal year, or a similar extended period, the department shall submit another form which reflects any additional cost to the initially submitted form. Each department shall maintain a travel report/log that reflects pertinent data and expenses, which may be audited by the County Auditor. The Auditor's report will be presented to the Budget Officer and Commissioners Court representatives.

The Office of Legislative Relations shall present a proposed order for legislative travel to Commissioners Court at the beginning of a new biennium of the Texas Legislature.

Vendor Paid Travel

Travel paid for by vendors or parties seeking to do business with the county is prohibited unless it is with another governmental organization/agency, part of a grant, or included in a contract/agreement as a strategic partner.

Receipt Requirements

The following receipts are required:

- Overnight lodging
- Airline tickets
- Taxi/Public transportation
- Rental cars/insurance
- Tolls
- Parking
- Seminars, conferences, training, external business meetings, etc.
- Meal reimbursements up to \$25 per day for travel outside of the county without an overnight stay

Refer to the County Auditor's *Travel Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures, T.1.*, for specific requirements.

Business Meeting Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages

Court approval is required for food and non-alcoholic beverages purchased and brought in to county facilities for county business meetings, if more than \$250 per event or \$15 per person. These expenses may be reimbursed if the following criteria are met:

- a. Meeting is agenda-driven and directly related to county business,
- b. Food and non-alcoholic beverages are an integral part of the meeting, not a personal convenience, and
- c. Meeting time includes a regular meal time and could not otherwise be scheduled during working hours. Regular meal times are defined as:
 1. Breakfast: 6:00-7:30 am
 2. Lunch: 11:30 am-1:30 pm
 3. Dinner: 5:30-7:30 pm

The county elected official or department head is accountable for determining:

- a. The necessity for expending public funds for food and non-alcoholic beverages,
- b. The appropriateness and accuracy of the claim,
- c. The availability of funds, and
- d. Conformity with county policy.

Itemized receipts are required for reimbursement along with a copy of the agenda. When substantiated on the receipt, customary tips/gratuities are reimbursable. Reimbursements are not allowed for alcoholic beverages, social functions, and retirement receptions.

Exceptions

Exceptions to this policy may be approved when necessary to meet special circumstances, emergencies, or when in the best interest of Harris County. Requests for exceptions shall be documented, explained, and submitted for approval by the county elected official or department head and the County Budget Officer.